

Separate the Members of the Works Council from the Action.

Works council members are people, not abstractions on the other side of the discussion table. They, like anyone else, have emotions, values, different backgrounds, and different viewpoints. People get angry, frustrated, depressed, fearful, hostile, and offended. They misinterpret each other. They tend to hear only what they want to hear. They send confusing signals. They play games. Scoring points against the other often becomes the main objective. To separate people from the matter discussed one should use a discussion technique which is characterized by trust, understanding, and respect.

Present the Case in a Professional Manner - Discussion Strategy.

Know your subject and present only concrete facts precisely (What, when, where, and why), calmly and without undue emotions. Listen carefully to the questions; make sure you understand the issue. Do not assume you know the question before you hear it in its entirety. Answer questions of the works council to the point. Do not volunteer to provide information going beyond the works council's questions and, most important, avoid any kind of speculation because subsequent questions of the works council will bite you.

When confronted with objections or counterproposals from the works council, avoid by all means a defensive attitude. Instead, listen carefully to what works council members have to say and your temper. It is proof of management's strength to ignore misbehavior on the

try to understand their point of view. Do not hesitate to ask questions if they help to clarify the issue.

Be open to all proposals of the council and show your appreciation for their contribution whether they are acceptable or not. However, be non-committal at the meeting. You have ample time to consider their proposals and arguments when time comes to render a decision.

Avoid discussion of legal opinions or positions. Their discussion is always at the expense of discussing underlying concerns and interests on both sides. Frequently, much time and efforts are wasted arguing positions and opinions back and forth until it turns out that no agreement can be reached. Listen to their legal argument, promise its consideration in the decision-making process, and request that discussion on the substance of the matter be continued.

Emotions.

Make emotions explicit and acknowledge them as legitimate (as opposed to "undue emotions" which are discouraged). For example, "I am truly upset that in spite of all the efforts we made to correct the employee's work attitude we are now compelled to discuss his termination". It is important to talk in terms of your own emotions, how you feel. Allow the works council to let off steam, too. However, do not permit aggressive (or even hostile) works council members to make you lose other side of the table, and a signal to the works council that you can ably

differentiate between persons and the action at issue.

Be Positive and Understanding.

Do not put your worst interpretation on what the works council says. For example, the works council's proposal to not have a reserve parking policy should not automatically be interpreted to mean that they are not interested in a compromise solution which then would have their full support.

Be aware that you also may have to discuss the perceptions of the works council. Realize that face-saving is a reality in dealings with them. Therefore, when it comes to this point, continue to insist on the action consistent with the works council's values. Often the works council will hold out not because the proposed action is unacceptable, but rather to avoid giving the appearance of giving in or backing down.